

# FLOODS AND GALES IN CAPE COLONY.

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SEPTEMBER, 1905.

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# FLOODS AND STORMS.

## *A Pictorial Record of the Memorable Storms in Cape Colony.*

SEPTEMBER, 1905.

THE month of September, 1905, will long be memorable in Cape Colony for the almost unprecedented heavy rainfall in the South-Western districts resulting in most disastrous floods, and for the terrible tornado which, in the early hours of September 29th, swept down upon the village of Malmesbury, carrying ruin and desolation in its train. In the following pages we propose to give a pictorial record of these events, together with a succinct account of the more remarkable occurrences, illustrated. In South Africa it is always a feast or a famine. It never rains but it pours. This year the rains which had been so eagerly looked for have, it is true, brought prosperity in their train. The agricultural outlook is better than it has been for twenty years past, and the break-up of the drought has brought sorely needed encouragement to the Colony at a time of general despondency. At the same time they have caused an enormous amount of loss in some districts, as the following pages will indicate.

### THE TORNADO AT MALMESBURY.

#### Several Persons Killed.

#### Wholesale Destruction of Property.

Of the long chapter of disasters which are recorded in the following pages by far the most serious was the calamity which befell the town of Malmesbury in the early morning of Friday, September 29th. Day was just dawning but the good folk of the town were for the most part still in their beds, when the overwhelming calamity fell upon their homes. The night before had given no presage of the impending disaster, although it was worthy of note that the barometer stood lower than had been the case for the past twenty years. A little rain fell and about three o'clock in the morning of the 29th, a thunder

storm broke over the town, lasting, however, only a few minutes. The next disturbance in the weather appears to have occurred a few minutes after five o'clock, when a torrential fall of rain occurred, stopping as suddenly as it began. Then came a momentary silence, followed after a short interval by a distant gathering roar, which grew in volume and approached rapidly nearer until, some seven minutes after the first remote rumble was heard, the tornado burst upon the town with awful violence, crushing, doubling up, and scattering in all directions everything that crossed its path. The tornado cut a straight path through the town—in breadth about 300 yards, and in length three-quarters of a mile—dealing death and destruction on its course. And it passed by in little more than half a minute. It swept over the town with a heavy burring roll, not unlike a succession of exceptionally heavy thunderclaps. One of its curious features—as stated by the few who were in a position to make any observations—was the illumination of the windcloud. One of the townsfolk states that he did not hear any noise at all. He woke at about two hours before the occurrence, then, after remaining awake for a few minutes, he extinguished his bedroom candle. As he did so, looking out of the window he saw a glare in the sky, which at the moment he assumed to be lightning. A somewhat similar glare was remarked by a cab-driver, who happened to be in the streets just after the storm had gone by. One lady declares that she heard a noise like something rumbling and rushing, but that she was too much scared to go to the door. Others describe the sound as being that of a tearing, and said they saw a fire in the sky, which—like the cyclone—passed in a moment. The first point of contact seems to have been near to Mr. Eckstein's house, and the north side of the river. The railings of Mr. Eckstein's property were uprooted and deposited in the road, but the dwelling was untouched. A similar thing happened on Mr. Bergh's property. In half-a-minute over seventy-five buildings had been unroofed or completely wrecked: enormous trees had been torn up by the roots: the Masonic Temple and the Roman Catholic Church had been left in irreparable ruin; floors and

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General View of the town : in the centre of picture will be noticed the Ruins of the Roman Catholic Church.

*Photo by]*

*[T. G. Ravenscroft.*

furniture and household property had been buried beneath masses of debris ; and, worse than all, seven lives had been lost and serious injury caused to a considerable number of inhabitants.

### **A FURIOUS CURRENT.**

In the presence of such a calamity, there is a perhaps not unnatural tendency to exaggerate the mischief, but the wholesale scale on which the wind storm carried destruction in its trail has by no means been over-stated, and the havoc which it has done, not on small, flimsily-built cottages, but on some of the best-constructed buildings in the town, can only be realised by eye-witnesses. From a good many places portions of buildings have been taken away, with a cleanness which human ingenuity could not have accomplished, leaving the bare walls standing. As illustrative of the immense power of the wind, it may be mentioned that away on the hill sides, about a half-mile or so beyond the damaged buildings, huge sheets of corrugated iron are strewn about, while it is reported that on a farm,

some 20 miles away, pieces of iron and clothing have been discovered, having evidently been borne bodily from Malmesbury dwellings. Evidences of the terrific force at work could be multiplied almost without limit. A piece of corrugated iron has been hurled with such fury against a big tree that it has cut through to the centre of the trunk. Near the Standard Bank there used to stand a stately, old blue-gum. The wind caught in its capacious branches, and the tree crashed to the ground. Its stump is exposed above the ground, and is about 4 feet high. In St. Thomas's Street and at the corner of the Main Street, near the ill-fated Commercial Hotel, many fine gum and fir trees have been brought to the ground. Still another striking instance of the mighty current that swept down may be given. This is at the Roman Catholic Church, which stood on the northern slopes of the town, quite removed from any other buildings. The structure was supported by strong buttressed walls, and was regarded as one of the sturdiest in Malmesbury, and yet, when it was struck at the side, the walls collapsed on to the floor. The strong iron rails on the boundary wall have been bent by the wind almost flush with the wall top, while in some other parts they have been dislodged from the masonry.





The Ruins in Main Street where the Tail of the Cyclone Struck.



Mr. Eksteen's House, one of the first struck by the cyclone.

A Scene in the Main Street.

Mr. Jan Loubser's House, where Dirk Loubser was killed.

*Photos by]*

*[T. G. Ravenscroft.*





All that remains of the Masonic Temple.

Another View of the Temple and Ruins in the neighbourhood.

The Boarding House where John Steyn was killed and the two young Van Aardes seriously hurt.

### THE FATALITIES.

All accounts agree that it was little short of marvellous that the casualty roll was so comparatively light. One of the saddest cases of loss of life occurred at the boarding house connected with the public school. There were thirty inmates, most of whom were to leave for their homes on the morrow, the holidays being due. When the cyclone struck the buildings it played havoc with them. It met them at the back, and, having swept over the dormitory building, it crashed its way clean through the upper story of the main structure. The dormitory, being single-storied and standing close up to the house proper, appears to have protected the

ground floor of the house from destruction by the wind. The ground floor rooms, however, suffered severely by the demolition of the upper story, the falling debris bursting through the ground floor ceilings. As for the dormitory, it was practically swept out of existence. Nothing of it stands but portions of the outer walls. Not a square inch of the roof has been left; the thatch is gone, except for the straw littered about the yard and buried in the debris. The walls which came down fell into the apartments, bringing away the dividing wall. The debris has not left a scrap of the floor-space exposed to view. The four shattered and broken walls now enclose a heaped-up mass of ruined materials. Underneath this mass lie shattered



The Commercial Hotel, Front View.

Ruins of the Commercial Hotel.

Miss Du Toit's House.

Photos by]

[T. G. Ravenscroft.





Gardens Street, showing the Boarding House where several casualties occurred.

[T. G. Ravenscroft.]

*Photos by]*

furniture and iron bedsteads. When the ruins were visited the taller head-pieces only of some of the bedsteads were visible above the debris. That will indicate how completely, and to what a height—it must be quite 4ft.—the floor-space was covered. The boy and girl who were killed slept in rooms close together, on the upper floor of the main building. The window of the boy's bedroom was the last one on the right-hand side and looked out into Gardens Street. A schoolfellow, Nicolaas Jordaan, son of Mr. Paul Jordaan, shared the room with young Steyn, the boys occupying separate beds. The wind has completely demolished this room; in fact, the whole of the right hand corner of the upper portion of the building. Poor Steyn was killed or smothered by the brickwork and materials which fell in upon his bed. Singularly enough, the very panic which Steyn's schoolfellow was thrown into by the noise of the approaching wind-torrent prompted him to do what must have saved his life. Nicolaas Jordaan relates that he was awakened by a noise. He was seized with fright, and jumping out of his own bed, threw himself on the floor and crept beneath Steyn's. The probability appears to be that young Steyn was killed, not smothered, but that he died in a few minutes from injuries caused by the falling debris, for, it is said,

Jordaan heard him call out for help after the crash had come. When assistance did arrive, Steyn was quite dead. His head was struck by the bricks of the collapsing wall. It was in this room that a large portion of the floor gave way, dropping into the dining-room. The little servant-girl was smothered in bed.

### Three Brothers Buried.

A detached cottage on the south side of the river, standing a little higher than the Masonic Temple, and facing Oliver Street, was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. John Loubser and their family of five sons—Johnnie (aged 13), Dirkie (12), Marthinus (10), Jasper (7), and Tobias (3). The dining-room, kitchen, etc., were located at the front, and the sleeping apartments at the back of the building, looking towards the river. The wind seems to have struck the cottage immediately after working so much havoc at the Masonic Temple, the result being that the dwelling was left in ruins, and Mr. Loubser's son Dirkie was killed by the debris. The house is absolutely beyond repair, and will need to be reconstructed from the ground. In three bedrooms, the ceiling has been burst by the falling





General View, looking from the Masonic Lodge.

[T. G. Ravenscroft.]

Photos by]

roof and walls, and the floors are littered to a depth of several feet in bricks and plaster. The furniture has been badly damaged, and the bedsteads have been twisted into all manner of shapes.

### Not a Survivor.

At the corner of Upper High-street and St. Thomas's-street a threefold tragedy was enacted. A respectable coloured man named Takea Edas and his wife (Delia) lived in a single story cottage along with their grandchild, Cornelius. The storm caught the wall on the St. Thomas's-street side and drove it over the floor, and likewise reduced the wall on the Upper High-street side to the ground. All that remained standing of the building when the wind had passed over was

portions of two walls. The roof and ceiling had disappeared entirely. The unfortunate old couple and their grandson, who slept in one bed, were completely buried under the heap of rubbish, and must have been killed instantaneously. Their son, who lives just by, went to the spot, and was the first to make the melancholy discovery of the awful thoroughness with which the wind had worked its will on his parents, and the baby and their little home. The old man, on being taken out of the wreckage, was found to have sustained a terrible blow on the head, and the child had been struck over the temple. A pathetic scene was to be observed on the site of the calamity in the morning. A group of coloured people, several of whom were weeping bitterly, had gathered about the ruins, and seemed to be trying, in their own simple and unlearned fashion, to comprehend the power which had so swiftly brought ruin and desolation to the little household.



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## Commercial Hotel.

The Commercial Hotel is another of the complete wrecks which mark the track of the wind. It stands at a corner where the thoroughfare bends round on the left-hand side of the main street, and on the north bank of the river near the bridge. Its front is on the main street and the building is two-storied. The wind struck it fair in the front, and played havoc with the upper story. Not a scrap of the roof is left, some of the upper part of the back wall has been carried

away and the interior walls are cracked. Every room on the upper floor is open to the sky, and in the case of two at the back the dividing wall has gone as cleanly as if it were never there, and the external wall has fallen. The roof must have come off bodily, for only a comparatively little debris dropped inside. No portion of the roof came through on to the ground floor, but the shock broke some of the heavy ceiling beams and bent the floors above. The wall which divides the dining-room on the ground floor from the hall passage is cracked and bent zigzag. The trees in front of the hotel have been uprooted and hurled to the ground.



*Photos by]*



Collapse of the Tower of the Dutch Reformed Church at George.

*[W. H. Biddulph.*

## LIST OF KILLED.

Following is a complete list of the killed :—

Takea Edas, aged about 65 years, of Upper High-street.

Delia Edas, aged about 65 (wife of the above).

Cornelius Edas, aged about 5 (grand child of the above).

John Steyn, aged 13, son of Stephanus Steyn, of Wildschut Vlei, Darling district.

Dirk Loubser, aged 12, son of John Loubser, of Oliver-street.

Lena Brown, aged 9, servant girl employed at the Public School Boarding-House, Garden-street.

Minnie Rajatti, aged about 25, of High-street.

Pieter van Aarde, son of Michael van Aarde (a Malay).





The Flood at the Great Brak River : the two crosses indicate the submerged bridge.



### Funeral of the Victims.

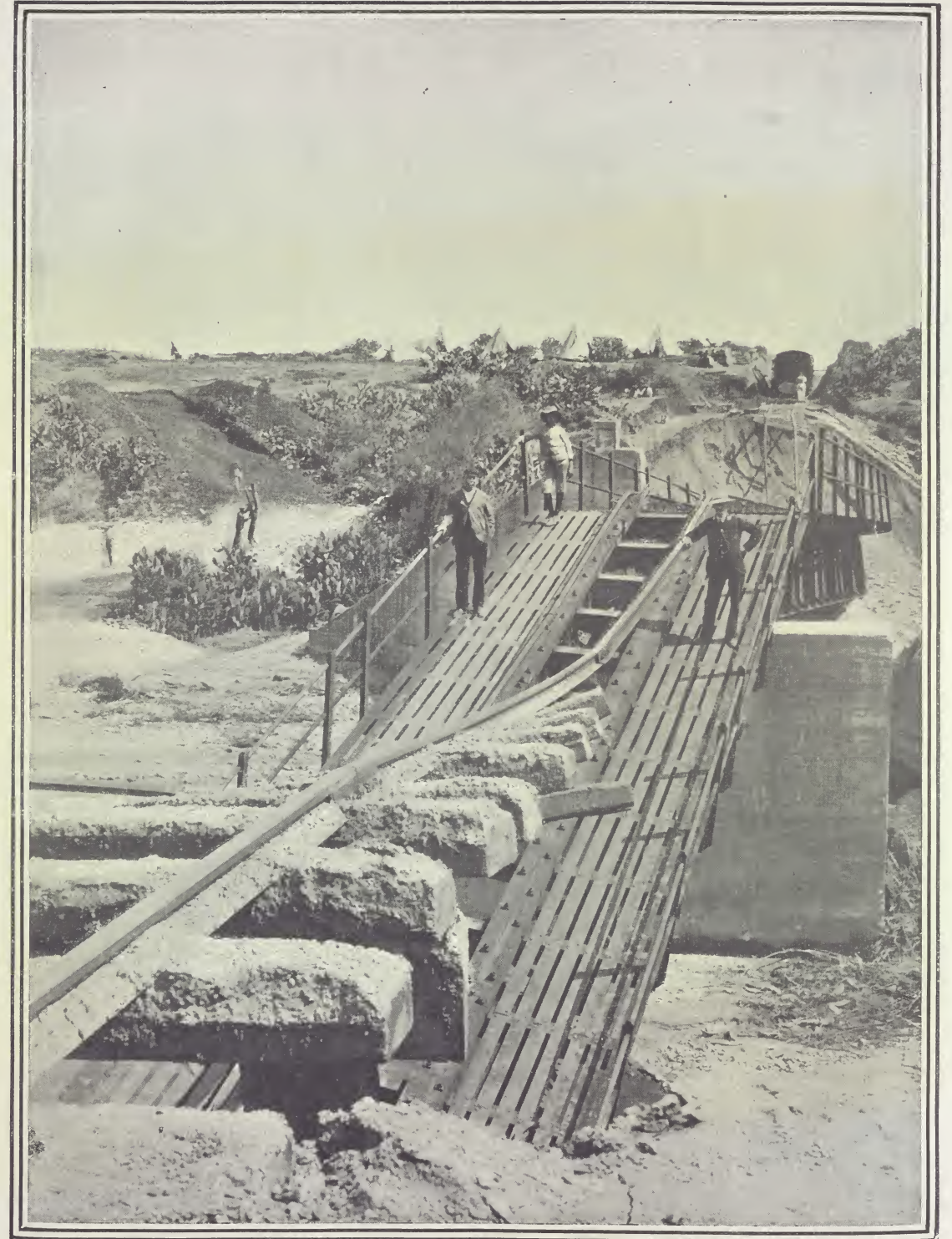
The unfortunate and mourned-for victims who were killed in the cyclone disaster were buried on the afternoon of September 30. The solemn procession was certainly one of the largest ever witnessed in this town, and about 1,500 mourners followed the earthly remains of the departed. The scene at the graveside was heartrending and painful. The streets were literally thronged with sorrowful spectators. The ceremony at the graveside was conducted by the Rev. C. Rabie, who delivered a most impressive and pathetic address.



The Floods at Glen Connor : Railway Bridge carried away. *Photo by* [R. Ramsey]

### THE FLOODS IN THE SOUTH-WEST.

The rains—which are particularly welcome in the Colony when they come on the threshold of spring—spread over a very large area, extending from Mossel Bay in the south to Kimberley in the north. Unfortunately, however, the rains in some districts were so heavy that floods—of a more or less disastrous nature—followed in their train, the rivers coming down in force, and overflowing their banks, causing widespread destruction. Great though the damage was in certain places, it is doubtful whether the timely arrival of the rains did not outweigh the losses inflicted by the floods.



Wreck of the Hazenjacht Bridge after the flood of Sept. 19. *Photo by* [A. Lewis.]





A View of Uitenhage, looking from the foot of Market Street.

### **Lives Lost at Hankey.**

The districts which suffered most from the floods were George and Hankey, those at the latter place being the greatest in the history of the village. Seven inches of rain fell in 36 hours.

The Klein River was in full flood on Tuesday night, September 12, but was subsiding on the following day, when the Gamtoos River, of which it is a tributary, came down swollen by the heavy rain in the Karoo. A very high sea held

back the water, thus turning the whole valley from the sea to above Hankey into a huge lake two miles wide. Thousands of acres of cultivated land were submerged to an average depth of ten feet, only the tops of the fruit trees showing above the water. Several lives were lost, including that of the eldest son of Mr. Humke, a Town Councillor, who tried to cross the Gamtoos River on horseback, and was drowned. A white woman and five children took refuge in a tree, where they remained all night till rescued by means of a raft by Messrs. Du Plessis and Hughes. The railway bridge across the Gamtoos River was swept away, while



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The Eaton Convalescent Home, the Roof of which was carried away early on Friday morning.

hundreds of ostriches and many head of cattle were drowned. Immense injury was done to the crops, and many houses were submerged and ruined, the occupants escaping in the nick of time. The irrigation works were also destroyed.

An estimate of the losses in the Gamtoos Valley from the floods totals £60,000 for private people, besides the damage done to bridges, roads, and the railway. Many farmers were practically ruined, and some families were destitute. The road through the Gamtoos River Poort was washed away.

The total rainfall from September 11th to September 26th was 11·23 inches in the Gamtoos Valley.



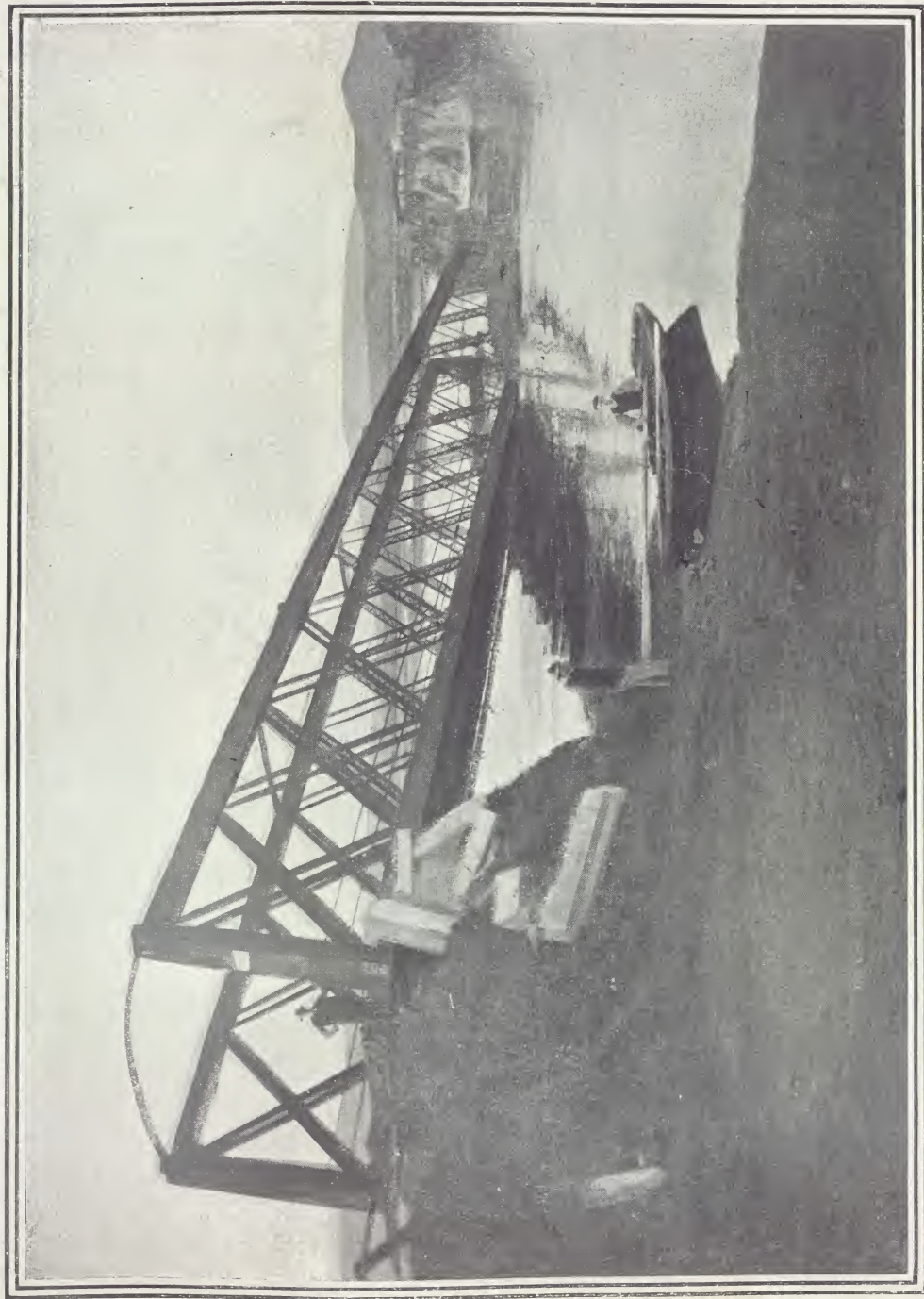
One of the Bedrooms in the Eaton Convalescent Home.

## DEVASTATION AT GEORGE.

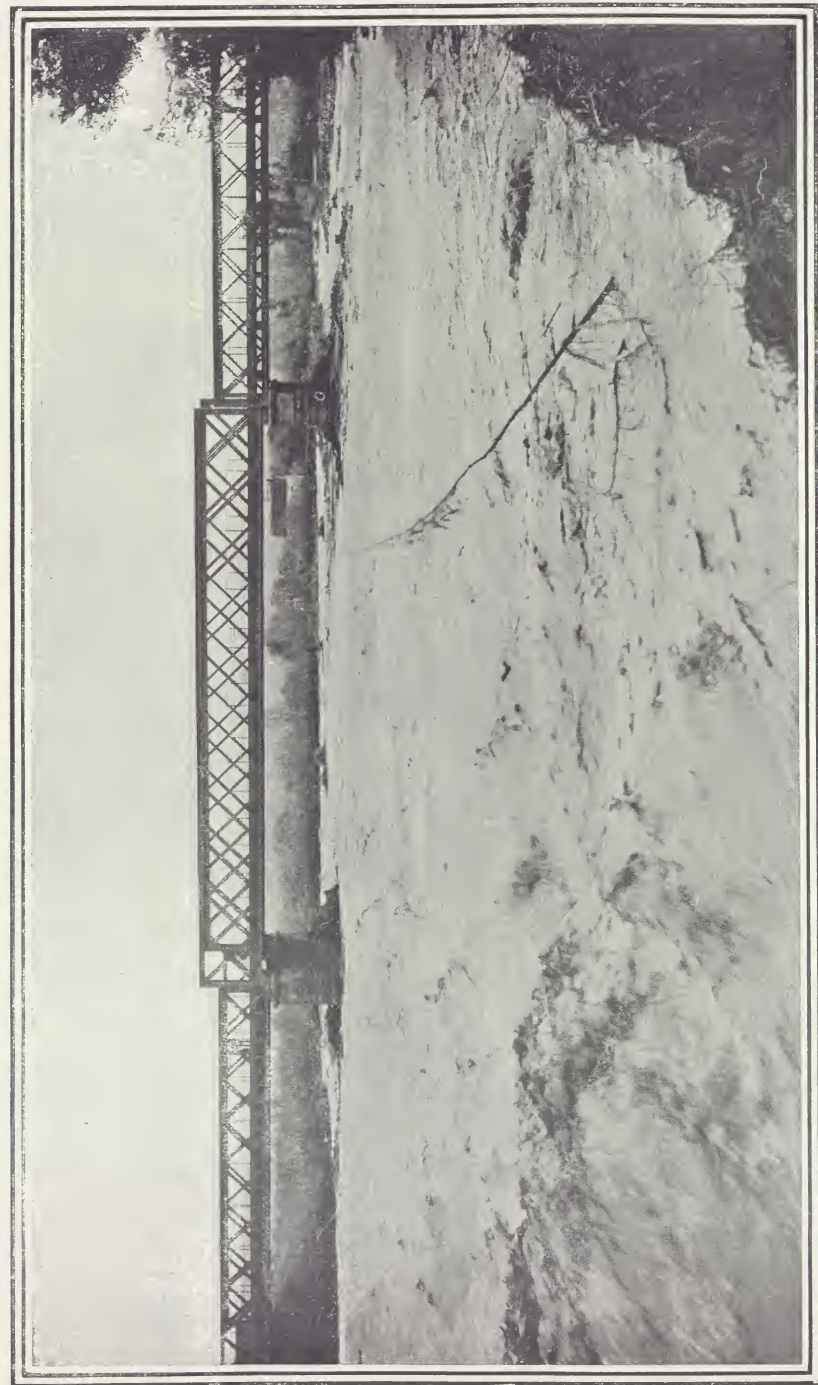
### Collapse of a Church.

The heaviest rainfall of all was recorded at George, over 14½ inches pouring down in 67 hours; altogether 17·57 inches were chronicled within a fortnight. On the night of September 12th the tower of the Dutch Reformed Church at George collapsed, damage being done to the extent of £3000. The tower foundations were cracked to the bottom, the front of the roof was broken up, and serious cracks were made in the front main walls. The Church was built in 1842 and restored last year. Collections are now being organised with the object of re-building the tower in its original form.





Sprigg Bridge, Little Brak River, washed away in the floods.

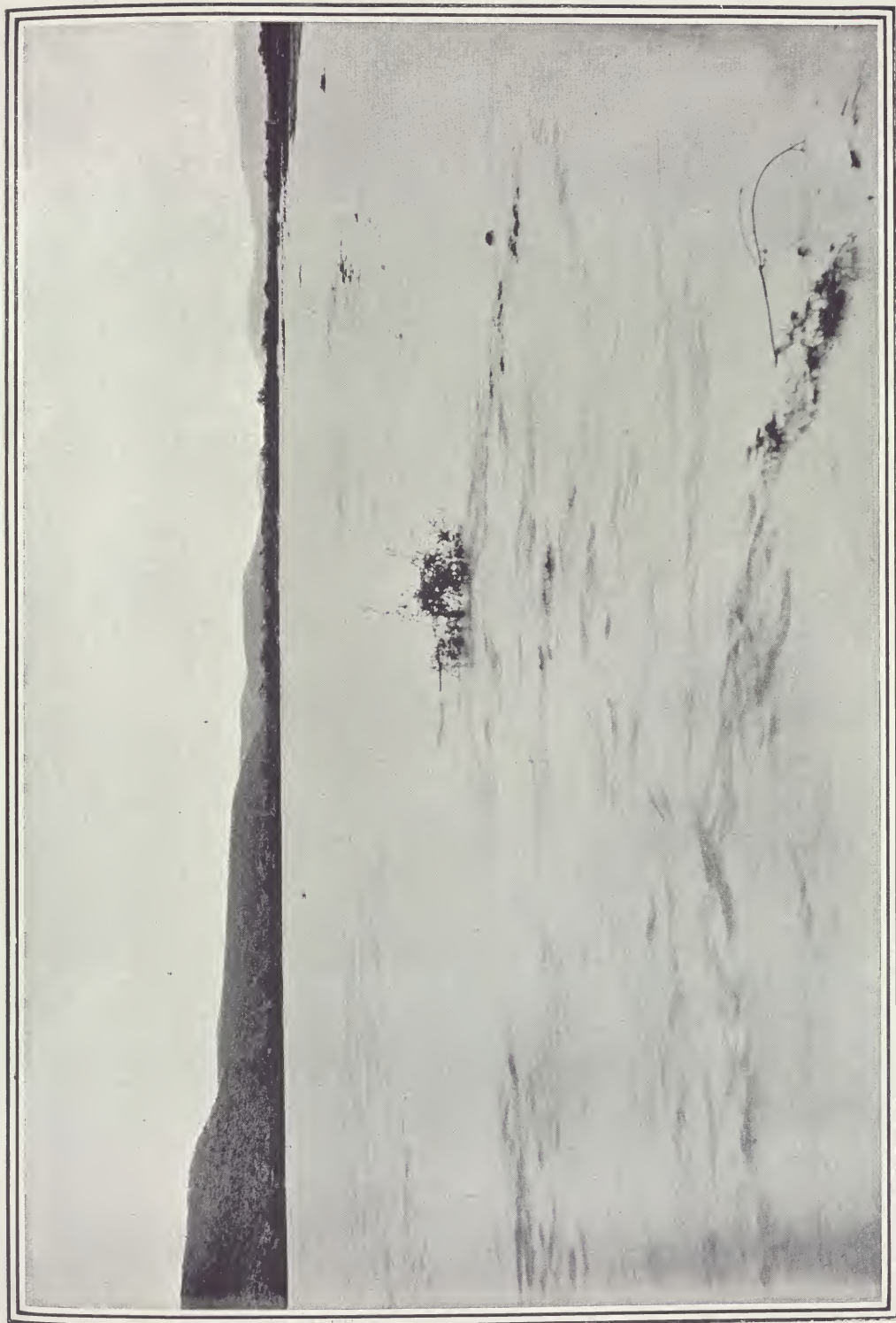


*Photo by]*

Grobbelaar's River in Flood, Oudtshoorn,

*[Pounden & Lithgow.*

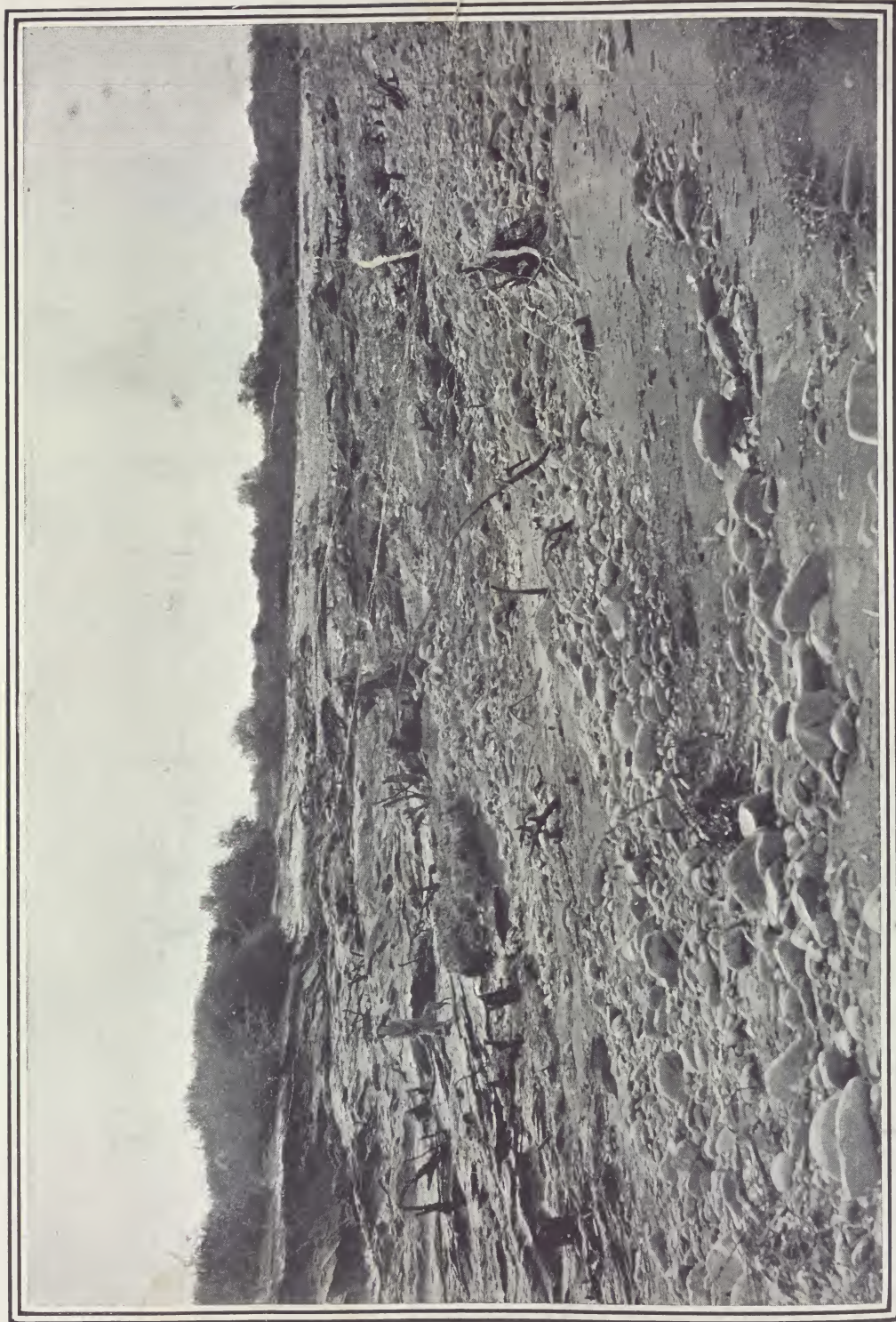




*Photo by]*

The Sunday River overflowing its banks at Dunbrody. Part of the fields here shown under water have been carried away, forming what will probably become a new bed.

*[J. C. Powells.*

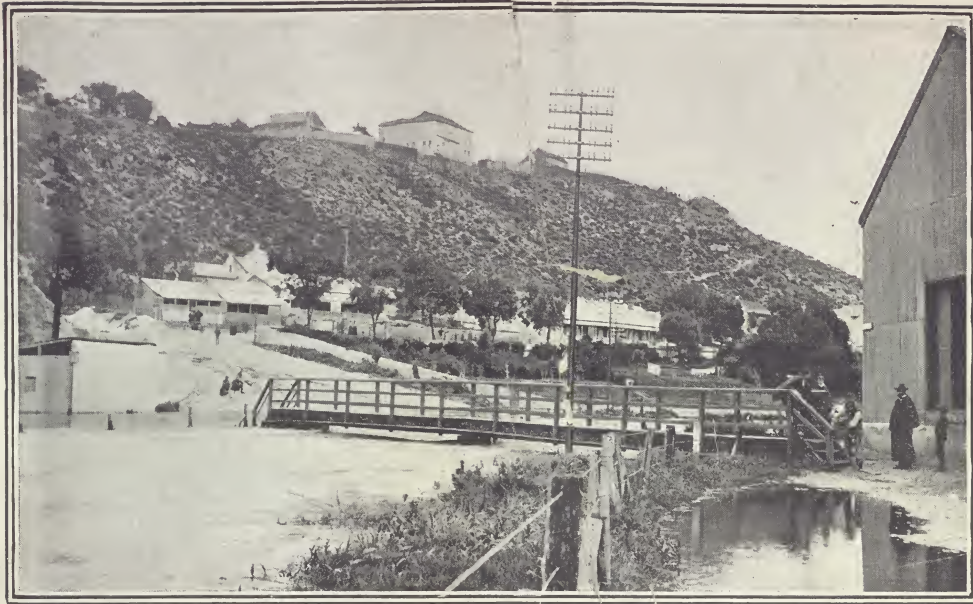


*Photo by]*

After the Flood had subsided : the fields washed away at Dunbrody.

*[J. C. Powells.*





Closing the Bridge. This is a small bridge that spans the Baakens River, the water at the highest time reached within a foot of same, and the bridge was thought in danger, therefore the officials had to close it to the Public.

The damage at George was not confined to the Church, for other public and private property also suffered. Fifteen sod houses in the outskirts of the town were demolished. The streets were like rivers, and Montagu Street Bridge, at the main entrance to the town, had a narrow escape. The Langbruk Bridge, between George and Great Brak River, was washed away, but the most serious accident of all was the collapse of Sprigg Bridge, a long iron bridge over Little Brak River, a tidal stream.

Hundreds of ostriches were lost, as well as many sheep, mules, donkeys, pigs, etc., all of which were swept away with the houses. The bank of the Great Brak River was strewn with the carcasses of cattle, as well as numerous orange trees.

Behind the Outeniqua range of mountains, some hundreds of acres of arable land were devastated, and many rivers entirely changed their course, causing disaster on every hand. Farm fences and walls were carried away by the floods, and in many places, where farm roads were laid out, these were obliterated. Serious damage was also done to the railway works.

## Losses at Oudtshoorn.

For forty hours rain fell in continuous and heavy showers in the Oudtshoorn district, immense losses being caused in all portions of the division. Meiring's railway bridge was washed away, and there was also a landslip in the cutting approaching the tunnel. Serious losses were sustained in the town lands adjacent to the river. One property of two and a half morgen, with a plantation of 500 full-grown gum trees and an orchard, completely disappeared. Others extending for three miles through the town were more or less damaged.

In the town of Oudtshoorn itself 618 dwellings were affected by the downpour, 41 houses absolutely collapsed, and 70 families had to leave their dwellings on the east side of the river. On the west bank two gables were affected, and 18 families had to share the hospitality of friends. At the location, 16 huts fell in, and 12 were seriously damaged.

## Swept out to Sea.

People living at Zwartkops, Redhouse, and Perseverance, on the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage line, which runs up the low-lying Zwartkops River Valley, had an anxious time on the night of September 12th. The river started to come down early in the afternoon, but about midnight a newly-built iron dam at Perseverance burst, and released a large volume of water, which rushed down, flooding both banks. Several houses collapsed, and at Redhouse the water completely covered the boathouses, and rose right up to the riverside residences. A number of boats and yachts, besides small wooden jetties, were swept out to sea by the flood, which rose to eight feet above high-water mark.



The Baakens in Flood. View taken from the Bridge shewn in accompanying photo. On the right side of picture can be seen the top of a notice board which was at normal times at least 30 feet from the river's bank.



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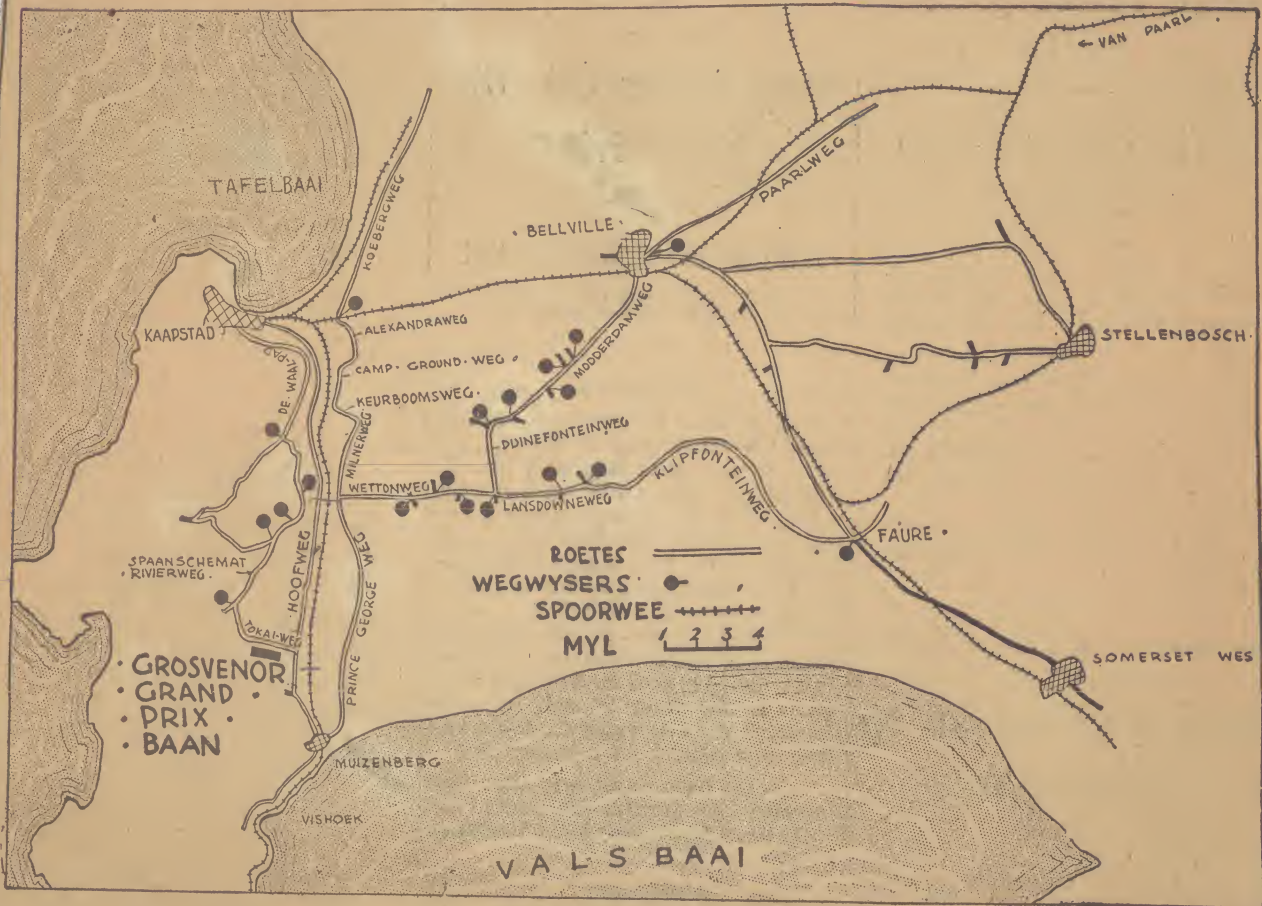
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Mnr. Rautenbach van Windsor-tonweg in daardie distrik, het reeds 1,800 skape verloor en van oral kom berigte van vee wat doodgaan. Ernstige terugslae staar menige boer in die gesig aldaar.

Die weer steek dikwels op, maar dit kom nooit tot 'n uitsakking van reën nie.

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## Baie Koeëlgewere op Humansdorp

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**SANNA VAN 80 JAAR  
GEREGISTREER**

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## BOERE GOOI HUL TUINE NAT

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### Skep Water Uit die Grootrivier

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## SWERMS SPRINKANE BY ONSEEPKANS

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(Eie Berig.)

POFADDER, 10 Jan.—Die droogte langs die Grootrivier is eindelik nie meer so 'n ernstige vraagstuk nie. Op die oggend van 5 Januarie het die water verby Onseepkans gestroom, en tot laat in die nag kon boere met lanterns op hul erwe gesien word besig om die half-verdroogde plante nat te gooi met water uit die rivier.

Die eerste water is nie baie nie, maar daar word verneem dat meer water aan die kom is. Vir sekere gewasse is die water te laat, daar die plant-tyd verby is, maar die boere kan egter nog mielies en boontjies saai.

Op die bulte is dit nog maar baie droog; die grassies as gevolg van die paar ligte reënbuie in Desember het weer verdroog.

In die afgelope paar weke was die sprinkaanjagters druk besig om swerms sprinkane uit te roei, wat uitgebloeit het op plase waarop reënbuie uitgesak het.

## LAATBERIGTE

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**ERKENNING VIR FRANCO  
BOEDAFEST.** Woensdag.—Oostenryk en Hongarye het besluit om Franco se regering in Spanje te erken luidens 'n amptelike verklaring wat vandag deur Italië en eersgenoemde twee lande uitgereik is.—(Reuter.)

*Spain*

### DE VALERA HOU SAMESPREKINGS

DUBLIN. Woensdag.—De Valera het vandag aangekondig dat reëlings getref is vir samesprekings tussen Ierland en Engeland in Londen op 17 Januarie. Belangrike vraagstukke wat albei lande raak sal daar bespreek word.—(R.)

*Spain*

### KAPMANNE EN MOORDE

PARYS. Woensdag.—Die Franse polisie het vandag aan die lig gebring dat daar verband is tussen



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